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For a symposium on *Epistemological Disjunctivism* in *Journal of Philosophical Research*

EPISTEMOLOGICAL DISJUNCTIVISM: RESPONSES TO MY CRITICS

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ABSTRACT. A response to commentaries on my book, *Epistemological Disjunctivism* (Oxford University Press, 2012), by Sanford Goldberg, Clayton Littlejohn, and Ram Neta. The themes covered include: the viability of the epistemological disjunctivist response to radical scepticism (Goldberg); the extent to which epistemological disjunctivism has dialectical advantages over classical epistemic internalism from an anti-sceptical point of view (Neta); and whether epistemological disjunctivism incorporates the right view of the nature of reasons (Littlejohn).

0. INTRODUCTION

Let me begin by thanking my commentators for taking the time to engage with my book (Pritchard 2012*b*) in such detail. It's an honour to have such distinguished philosophers critiquing one's work. I will respond to each of my critics in turn, starting with Sanford Goldberg (*this volume*).

1. RESPONSE TO SANFORD GOLDBERG

Goldberg's comments are particularly helpful ones to focus on from the outset in that they raise concerns about epistemological disjunctivism, and about the epistemological disjunctivist response to radical scepticism in particular, which I think many will share. Goldberg starts out by noting that I

don't commit the epistemological disjunctivist to a reliability condition on knowledge, and he proceeds to raise a concern for any theory of knowledge which doesn't have such a condition. Let me be clear then that my own view is that there *is* a reliability condition on knowledge. In particular, as I've argued elsewhere, knowledge involves the subject manifesting a relevant cognitive ability, where I take cognitive abilities to be defined in part by a reliability condition.¹ My point in the book was just that there is nothing in epistemological disjunctivism—which, note, is not a view about knowledge in general, but only about perceptual knowledge (indeed, arguably, it is only actually about *paradigmatic* perceptual knowledge)—which commits one to a general reliability condition on knowledge. That's compatible with there being independent reasons to endorse such a condition, and I think there are such reasons. Goldberg and I therefore have no disagreement here, I'm pleased to say, so let us move on to Goldberg's more substantive complaints regarding the epistemological disjunctivist response to radical scepticism.

On this score Goldberg begins by noting that epistemological disjunctivism rejects the new evil demon thesis, which is, essentially, the thesis that the reflectively accessible rational standing of one's worldly beliefs even in paradigmatic epistemic conditions (henceforth, the 'good case') can be no better than the rational standing of the corresponding beliefs of one's counterpart imprisoned in the vat (henceforth, the 'bad case').² That is exactly right. Unlike classical forms of epistemic internalism, epistemological disjunctivists argue that the reflectively accessible rational support available to a believer can be very different depending on whether one is envatted or in paradigmatic epistemic conditions. In the former case, according to epistemological disjunctivism, a factive rational basis is available to one, but clearly this is not available in the latter case (where one's beliefs are mostly false).

Note that the rejection of the new evil demon thesis is not a by-product of epistemological disjunctivism (which is how Goldberg presents the matter), but rather a core component of the view. The epistemological disjunctivist claims that this thesis is of dubious pedigree, since it in effect encapsulates the idea that the reflectively accessible rational support one has for one's perceptual beliefs cannot be factive, even in the good case. If the reflectively accessible rational support one has for one's perceptual beliefs in the good case can be no better than one's envatted counterpart, then of course it can't be factive, since one's envatted counterpart need have no true beliefs about the world. If the epistemological disjunctivism is right, then, it follows that the new evil demon thesis must be false.

Moreover, epistemological disjunctivists argue that the new evil demon thesis is not rooted in our commonsense ways of thinking about perceptual knowledge. Indeed, our ordinary ways of thinking about perceptual knowledge seem essentially wedded to the possibility of factive rational support. The drive to reject this quotidian view of perceptual knowledge, and endorse instead the new evil genius thesis, is the result of philosophical theorising to the effect that epistemological disjunctivism is simply an unavailable position. If this theorising is mistaken, as the epistemological disjunctivist maintains, then we can legitimately return to the commonsense view about perceptual knowledge which has factive reasons at its heart, and which stands opposed to the new evil demon thesis.

Goldberg claims that the epistemological disjunctivist rejection of the new evil demon thesis is a failing in the view. He writes that by rejecting this thesis epistemological disjunctivism loses some of the “comforting reassurance” that classical internalism offers. But this is very puzzling, as the new evil demon thesis offers us no intellectual comfort at all. Think about it: if this thesis is true, then it follows that your rational standing can be no better than it would be in the corresponding sceptical scenario, even if one is in fact in the good case. What is reassuring about that?

In contrast, epistemological disjunctivism, by motivating the rejection of the new evil demon thesis, is able to explain how, when one is in the good case, one has a rational basis reflectively available to one which excludes the possibility that one is in the bad case. That surely is an intellectual comfort, and it is a comfort that only the epistemological disjunctivist can offer. Moreover, the epistemological disjunctivist can offer this comfort precisely *because* she denies the new evil demon thesis.

I think we get a sense of the source of Goldberg’s scepticism in this regard once we consider his remark that it is still true even by epistemological disjunctivist lights that one cannot “tell from the inside” whether one is in the good or the bad case. He concludes that the epistemological disjunctivist is therefore no better off than the epistemic externalist on this front.

The first point to note is that even if this were so, adding the new evil demon thesis to epistemological disjunctivism would make no difference. Indeed, one would be even worse off with regard to the sceptical problem (in that it would now in addition be true that the rational standing for one’s beliefs can be no better in the good case than in the radical sceptical bad case). So that’s a red herring in this regard.

The second point to note is that Goldberg’s claim that according to the epistemological disjunctivist one cannot tell from the inside whether one is in the good or the bad case is ambiguous.

Read one way, it might mean that one lacks a means of perceptually discriminating between the good case and the bad case. But no one, including the epistemological disjunctivist, would deny this claim. Indeed, it is part of the set-up of good and bad cases that they are indistinguishable in just this fashion. Nonetheless, the epistemological disjunctivist argues, via appeal to the perfectly general distinction between favouring and discriminating epistemic support (i.e., perfectly general in that everyone ought to endorse it; it isn't a proposal specific to epistemological disjunctivism), that there *is* a way of knowing that one is in the good case rather than the bad case, and that this is in virtue of one's reflectively accessible factive rational support.

So the epistemological disjunctivist claim is precisely that one *can* tell from the inside that one is in the good case rather than the bad case (albeit not via a perceptual discrimination). In this sense epistemological disjunctivism is very different from both classical epistemic internalism (which endorses the new evil demon thesis) and classical epistemic externalism, in that this is not something that either of these views can do. Classical epistemic internalism can't do this since one's rational support is for them no better in the good case than it is in the corresponding sceptical bad case. And classical epistemic externalism can't do this because although there is an (externalist) epistemic difference between the two agents in the good case and the sceptical bad case, it is not one that is reflectively accessible to the subject. *Contra* Goldberg, then, epistemological disjunctivism *does* offer us a way of responding to radical scepticism which is unavailable to classical epistemic externalism; it also offers us an intellectual comfort in this regard that classical epistemic internalism simply cannot offer.

But there is another way of reading Goldberg's claim that even the epistemological disjunctivist cannot tell from the inside whether she is in the good or the bad case, and that is as requiring that she can do this *both* when she is in the good case *and* when she is in the sceptical bad case. If that's what he has in mind, then of course he's right, since even the epistemological disjunctivist allows that when one is in the sceptical bad case then one is epistemically doomed. The epistemological disjunctivist claim is only that when one is in the good case one can know that one is in the good case rather than the bad case.

But I don't think that it is a failing of epistemological disjunctivism that it doesn't offer a way of telling that one is in the bad case. Indeed, I think *all* epistemologists ought to grant that this isn't going to be possible—i.e., it's not something that a response to radical scepticism should even aspire to achieve. In order to see this we need to revisit the radical sceptical paradox. What makes this paradox so intellectually disturbing is the idea that even if epistemic conditions are optimal one still

is not in a position to have widespread knowledge. That is the source of the disquiet. That we don't have widespread knowledge when we are the victims of radical sceptical hypotheses, in contrast, is obviously true, and hardly worth worrying about in itself.

With that in mind, why should it matter that if we are in the sceptical bad case we are epistemically doomed, just so long as if we are in the good case then we can have the reflective assurance regarding our epistemic position that the sceptic wishes to deprive us of? Put another way, if radical scepticism is the paradox that it purports to be, then it should be able to effect its sceptical conclusion *regardless* of the actual conditions that we find ourselves in, whether good or bad. If we can show that the sceptical conclusion only obtains in the sceptical bad case, however, then it follows that we haven't been presented with a sceptical *paradox* at all, but rather merely shown the negative epistemic results of being in the sceptical bad case (something which we knew already).

That said, I think Goldberg has nonetheless put his finger on a deep point regarding our engagement with radical scepticism, which is the very natural urge to want a way of dealing with this problem that offers us a reflective route of the difficulty in *all* conditions. I think we should resist this urge, and diagnose its source in a faulty, albeit appealing, picture of the nature of the sceptical challenge. In any case, the point I want to make is that epistemological disjunctivism represents the *strongest* response to the radical sceptic that we should aspire to—*viz.*, one that offers an internalistically respectable way of knowing, in the good case, that one is in the good case rather than the sceptical bad case. Classical epistemic internalism and classical epistemic externalism cannot offer even this much. And no response to radical scepticism can offer us more or should aspire to offer us more.

Finally we come to Goldberg's remarks about claims to know in the context of the sceptical puzzle. Think again about Dretske's zebra case that I briefly outlined in the *précis* above. Now add the stipulation that it is very clear that the person raising the cleverly disguised mule alternative has no rational basis whatsoever for this error-possibility; they are rather simply raising it on a whim. How might one respond? My claim is that, insofar as one responds at all (one might, reasonably on my view, choose to ignore such frivolity), it would be very natural to offer the relevant factive rational support: that you can *see that* it's a zebra. In general, unless someone presents you a rationally motivated error-possibility, I think citing factive rational support in this way is the natural way to respond (if one responds at all).

One point I make in this regard is that we should be wary of the fact that claims to know can sometimes imply that one is in possession of relevant discriminatory epistemic support (note the

‘sometimes’ here—I’m not making offering any universal rules regarding claims to know, much less assertions more generally). So reiterating that one knows that the creature is a zebra in a conversational context where the cleverly disguised mule alternative has been raised could plausibly imply that one has reason to think that one is able to perceptually discriminate between zebras and cleverly disguised mules. If so, the assertion will feel wrong unless it is qualified. But qualifying it is no bother: one just insists, quite rightly given that the error-possibility is not rationally motivated, that even though one cannot tell the difference between zebras and cleverly disguised mules, one nonetheless does know that this is a zebra.

One does not need to be an epistemological disjunctivist to explain what is going here. The point is that one can have knowledge in virtue of favouring epistemic support even while lacking discriminating epistemic support. In cases where one has an excellent rational basis for believing that the creature is a zebra, and no rational basis is offered for the cleverly disguised mule alternative, then such favouring epistemic support is easy to come by. The crux of the matter is that once we recognise the distinction between favouring and discriminating epistemic support then we should be on our guard against any move to directly convert one’s inability to perceptually discriminate between zebras and cleverly disguised mules into the claim that one cannot know that the creature before one is a zebra. This is a *non sequitur*, and so this inference should be resisted.

The radical sceptical case is different from the zebra case in a number of ways, not least because radical sceptical error-possibilities call even one’s background information into question. But we can bracket these differences for our purposes and focus on what they have in common: since radical sceptical hypotheses are in their nature rationally unmotivated, so we can legitimately respond by citing our factive rational support.

Now I don’t know what the rules are for conversational interchange with the radical sceptic; I think all will surely agree that this is a conversational context which is somewhat artificial. But we can imagine that this conversational context will at least tend to roughly mirror normal conversational contexts where a rationally unmotivated error-possibility is presented. With that in mind, then, just like the zebra case, we should be wary of the sceptic trying to illicitly infer from one’s inability to be able to perceptually discriminate between the good case and the sceptical bad case that one cannot have the knowledge at issue in the good case. Once we are clear that one’s knowledge in the good case is supported by (factive) favouring epistemic support and not discriminating epistemic support, then we have a way of showing that this inference is faulty. That is, the epistemological disjunctivist can make explicit that the rational support in question is not of the

discriminating variety (i.e., it's not a reason for thinking that one could perceptually tell the difference). With this made clear, there is no scope for possible confusion.

That, in any case, is the view. Goldberg thinks that it's question-begging, since it's a way of showing why we can legitimately claim anti-sceptical knowledge that appeals to epistemological disjunctivism. I don't see that at all. It's not epistemological disjunctivism which licenses the legitimacy of this style of anti-sceptical response; rather, its role is to *explain* why this anti-sceptical response works. I don't see anything question-begging about that.

Goldberg also says that the epistemic externalist can make a parallel move. He doesn't spell this out in detail, but presumably the idea is to support one's claim to know by appeal to an externalist epistemic condition, such as a reliability condition. But notice how much stronger the epistemological disjunctivist move is in this regard: one can respond to the radical sceptical challenge by affirming that one knows that *p* because one sees that *p*, where this is a reflectively accessible rational basis. The epistemic externalist response to radical scepticism is nowhere near as heroic in comparison.

One last point I want to make in this regard is that, as I noted in the *précis*, I don't think that epistemological disjunctivism offers the complete response to radical scepticism. I think it is a core part of a complete response, and that it is the best response available of those currently on offer in the literature. But I also think it has a flaw, not least in how it fails to incorporate what I think is an important Wittgensteinian insight about the essential locality of rational evaluation. I don't think this matters for my response to Goldberg's objection, since this objection doesn't trade on any aspect of epistemological disjunctivism which would be altered if combined with this Wittgensteinian proposal. But it does matter to how in general one ought to evaluate the epistemological disjunctivist response to radical scepticism. In short, my claim is that epistemological disjunctivism is best understood as targeted against underdetermination-based radical scepticism, and not closure-based scepticism (the latter being the proper focus of the Wittgensteinian insight). With the sceptical target so understood, epistemological disjunctivism is the sceptic's nemesis.³

2. RESPONSE TO RAM NETA

I'm pleased to see Ram Neta (*this volume*) banging the drum for good old-fashioned epistemic internalism (i.e., of the non-disjunctivist variety), and making a case for its anti-sceptical credentials.

Neta basically thinks that epistemic internalism of this variety is fine as it is, and hence there is no need for the move to epistemological disjunctivism. While I agree with Neta that classical epistemic internalism is not a lost cause on this front, I think the advantages of epistemological disjunctivism over its classical variant are pretty clear.

Neta offers us four anti-sceptical strategies which he believes the classical epistemic internalist can appeal to in order to gain as much purchase on the sceptical problem as is offered by epistemological disjunctivism. Some of these are more promising than others. I don't think that the kind of content externalist response to radical scepticism offered by Hilary Putnam (1981) stands up to closer scrutiny, for example, but the reasons for this are complex, so I will set this proposal to one side here.⁴ I'm similarly doubtful about how much anti-sceptical import one can extract from Tyler Burge's (2003) account of perceptual entitlement, though I'm willing to concede that this approach is more plausible than that offered by Putnam.⁵ For reasons of space, however, I'm going to focus on the other two anti-sceptical proposals that Neta puts forward, due to Donald Davidson (e.g., 1983) and Ernest Sosa (2011). I will be arguing that even if they provide some anti-sceptical comfort for the classical epistemic internalist, they don't make anything like the headway against the radical sceptic that is offered by epistemological disjunctivism.

As I noted in the *précis*, and again in my response to Goldberg, my treatment of radical scepticism in *Epistemological Disjunctivism* is only partial, with my full account of how one should respond to this problem expounded in my forthcoming monograph which is devoted to the topic. In particular, my considered view about radical scepticism is that epistemological disjunctivism is the solution to underdetermination-based radical scepticism, with a broadly Wittgensteinian solution being required to deal with the closure-based radical scepticism (I argue that these two types of sceptical argument, while superficially very similar, are in fact logically distinct). So let's focus on underdetermination-based radical scepticism.

I claim that this form of scepticism poses its strongest challenge when directed at rationally grounded knowledge, as follows:

Underdetermination-Based Radical Scepticism

- (S1) One does not have better rational support for believing that one is seated at one's desk than that one is a BIV.
- (S2) If one lacks a rational basis which favours one's belief that one is seated at one's desk over the BIV scenario, then one lacks rationally supported knowledge that one is seated at one's desk.
- (SC) I have rationally supported knowledge that I am seated at my desk.

The motivation for (S1) is the new evil genius thesis which we encountered above—*viz.*, that our beliefs in the good case cannot have a better rational standing than the rational standing enjoyed by our envatted counterpart in the bad case. This thesis is widely accepted by epistemologists, and is often cited in support of classical epistemic internalism (in the sense that only this view can properly accommodate this thesis).⁶ I take Neta to be granting that classical epistemic internalism, as he understands this view, is committed to the new evil genius thesis, and hence will allow that there is at least *prima facie* support for (S1) from this quarter.

(S2) is motivated by this principle:

The Underdetermination Principle

If *S* knows that *p* and *q* describe incompatible scenarios, and yet *S* lacks a rational basis for preferring *p* over *q*, then *S* lacks rationally supported knowledge that *p*.

Again, this is widely accepted, and in particular is often associated with classical epistemic internalism.⁷ It thus ought to be problematic to suppose that classical epistemic internalism as Neta understands it is happy to sign up to the underdetermination principle as well, and hence will be happy to grant (S2). The problem, of course, is that (S1) and (S2) together validly entail the sceptical conclusion, (SC). This means that Neta's idea must be that the classical epistemic internalist has a way of rejecting (S1), even despite this being supported by the new evil genius thesis which is a key element of classical epistemic internalism as it is usually understood. In particular, I take it the idea will be that while one's perceptual experience in the good case cannot offer a rational standing for one's perceptual beliefs which is superior to that enjoyed by one's counterpart in the bad case, nonetheless there is an independent rational basis which can enable one to reject (S1).

With this formulation of the sceptical problem in hand, consider now how the anti-sceptical line that Neta attributes to Sosa and Davidson fare. We will take them in turn. Neta casts Sosa's anti-scepticism as a transcendental argument. Here is the key passage in Neta's presentation of Sosa's argument:

"Since we cannot coherently affirm that the skeptic's hypothesis may be true, but we can coherently deny that the skeptic's hypothesis may be true, we are obligated to deny that the skeptic's hypothesis may be true if we form any attitude about it at all." (Neta XXX)

Let us grant that Neta (and thus Sosa) is quite right that we cannot coherently affirm that radical sceptical hypotheses are true. I think that in a certain sense of 'coherence' this is quite plausible, so I will gladly grant this claim. In particular, I grant that the idea of endorsing sceptical hypotheses is incoherent both in the sense of being psychologically unrealistic and also epistemically self-defeating.

The crux of the matter is thus whether it follows that we are rational, from an epistemic point of view, in discounting radical sceptical hypotheses. In particular, are we rational in discounting them, from this point of view, in such a fashion that would afford us a response to the radical sceptical argument just outlined, such that (*contra* (S1)) one has a better rational basis for believing an everyday proposition over the radical sceptical alternative that one is a BIV?

I think that this further move is dubious, to say the least. In particular, I claim that the apparent progress offered by Sosa's 'transcendental' response to radical scepticism is illusory. More specifically, I think it reveals a failure—quite common in philosophical treatments of the problem of radical scepticism—to treat the difficulty poised in this regard as a putative *paradox* rather than as a philosophical *position* that one might actually endorse. This is not to say that there are not sceptical positions available—Pyrrhonism is meant to be an ethical sceptical stance after all—but only that radical scepticism in its strongest guise is a paradox and not a position. That is, it is meant to be a puzzle that arises out of one's own pre-theoretical commitments, whereby a contradiction is seemingly generated from those commitments alone. The point about genuine paradoxes is that every line of response involves radical revision in one's ordinary pre-theoretical commitments—i.e., there are no 'happy-face' solutions to *bona fide* paradoxes⁸—with the position of radical scepticism (i.e., the endorsement of the radical sceptical conclusion) as simply the most unsavoury way out of the paradox.⁹

The manner in which this point relates back to Sosa's supposedly transcendental response to radical scepticism is that it involves inferring from our rational inability to believe in radical sceptical hypotheses to the conclusion that the denials of such hypotheses are rationally believed. But this is a bridge that no mere transcendental argument of this kind can cross.¹⁰ As just noted, I think Sosa is quite right that we are psychologically compelled to believe that we are not radically mistaken, and that endorsing radical sceptical hypotheses would be epistemically self-defeating. Indeed, following Wittgenstein (1969), I've argued elsewhere—see Pritchard (2012*c*, 2014*a*, *forthcoming*)—that our commitment to the denials of radical sceptical hypotheses is an arational and non-optional "hinge" commitment on our part, something which we must be committed to in order to be believers, much less rational agents, at all. Relatedly, Sosa is surely right that actively endorsing the sceptical conclusion—i.e., adopting radical scepticism as a *position*—will lead to absurdity (of a certain kind anyway). This, however, should not come to us as news, at least insofar as we remind ourselves that

we are dealing with a putative paradox. Indeed, as noted above, endorsing the sceptical conclusion in light of this paradox is arguably the most counterintuitive response to take.

In any case, how are we supposed to get from these claims about the incoherence of endorsing sceptical hypotheses to the claim that one has sufficient reason to reject them (i.e., sufficient for the purposes of rejecting (S1))? After all, that endorsing sceptical hypotheses leads to incoherence hardly gives us any basis for thinking that the denials of radical sceptical hypotheses are true, and hence it offers no epistemic basis for rejecting (S1). As such, Sosa's anti-sceptical strategy doesn't even get as far as establishing Neta's weakest anti-sceptical condition "(a)", which recall he describes as the thesis that the internalist can explain why the whole body of our worldly beliefs is objectively likely to be mostly true. Since Sosa's strategy only shows that we are obliged, on pain of incoherence, to be committed to the falsity of radical sceptical scenarios, and not that we have any positive rational support for this commitment, it offers no objective grounds for thinking that our worldly beliefs are mostly true.

I take the anti-sceptical strategy that Sosa is attempting to put forward to be essentially that proposed by Crispin Wright (e.g., 2004), and so susceptible to similar difficulties. Recall that Wright argues that since not being committed to the denials of radical sceptical hypotheses would lead to cognitive paralysis, and since we have no rational basis for thinking that such hypotheses are true, hence we are *entitled* to regard them as false even while lacking a rational basis for regarding them as such. Like Sosa, Wright thus tries to argue from the fact that endorsing sceptical hypotheses would lead to cognitive paralysis to the claim that we have some rational basis for being committed to the denials of sceptical hypotheses (even though we have no rational basis for regarding such denials as false). Given the similarities between the two proposals, we would expect Sosa's view to inherit the same family of problems that have been levelled at Wright's stance.

Here, for example, is one kind of difficulty that Wright's proposal faces. Even if one grants that there is a kind of epistemic rationality which is *indirect*, such that it can be epistemically rational to endorse p even when one is fully aware that one has no rational basis for regarding p as true,¹¹ it remains the case that such an indirect epistemic rationality is not compatible with *belief* that p (at least insofar as we understand belief as the kind of propositional attitude which is a constituent of knowledge). This is because to believe that p is to believe that p is true—one cannot, as Wright himself recognises, believe that p whilst simultaneously regarding oneself as having no rational basis for regarding p as true (that propositional attitude would be more akin to a wishful thinking than a believing). But once this much is conceded, the anti-sceptical game is lost, since if one can't believe

that the radical sceptical hypotheses are false then one can't know them either. One certainly lacks a rational basis for preferring one's everyday beliefs over known to be incompatible sceptical alternatives, and hence (S1) holds.¹² The Sosa-Wright brand of anti-scepticism thus offers us nothing like the anti-sceptical potential of epistemological disjunctivism, a view which can provide one (in the right conditions) with reflectively accessible *factive* reasons in support of one's perceptual beliefs (*contra* (S1)).

This brings us to Davidson's brand of anti-scepticism. As I have argued elsewhere—see Pritchard (2013; *forthcoming*, ch. 4)—I think that there is merit in the idea that Davidson makes some headway against the radical sceptic. But I don't think that Davidson's anti-scepticism, even on its most robust construal, is anything like as potent as that offered by epistemological disjunctivism. As is now familiar, there are many twists and turns in Davidson's presentation of this anti-sceptical argument, but let us skip straight to his considered position in this regard.¹³ So construed, Davidson's argument is a straightforward transcendental argument which begins with a philosophical claim about the nature of content—an externalist proposal, which has Davidson's notion of 'triangulation' at its heart. Davidson then proceeds to note that according to this proposal one cannot consistently regard oneself as a believer and also regard one's beliefs as being massively in error. Hence, insofar as one endorses the variety of content externalism that Davidson advocates, then one is obliged to regard one's beliefs as mostly true.

A few comments are in order with regard to this anti-sceptical claim. First, at no point does Davidson argue that it follows from this anti-sceptical conclusion that one has a rational basis for regarding any particular belief that one holds as being true, much less can one conclude that one has knowledge of any particular belief that one holds. The anti-sceptical conclusion is that one is committed to supposing that there must be widespread truth in one's beliefs; this does not tell us where the truth lies.¹⁴ Thus, Davidson would not follow Neta in arguing that his anti-scepticism gives us particular rational assurance for the truth of particular beliefs. At the very least, then, Davidson's approach does not have the anti-sceptical potential that epistemological disjunctivism offers, as this offers not just rational assurance for particular worldly beliefs, but more specifically the prospect of *factive* rational support.

Still, one might argue that so long as Davidson's anti-sceptical strategy establishes a general presumption in favour of the truth of one's beliefs, then that's enough to deal with the underdetermination-based radical scepticism set out above. In particular, don't we now have a

rational basis to reject (S1) in this argument and therefore claim, as the epistemological disjunctivist does (albeit on a different basis), that it is simply not true that we are doomed to lack a rational foundation for preferring our everyday beliefs over competing radical sceptical hypotheses? This brings to me to my second observation about Davidson's anti-scepticism, which is that it is explicitly relative to a particular view about content. Thus it follows that the correctness of this brand of anti-scepticism is hostage to wider philosophical claims from outwith epistemology. In this regard, epistemological disjunctivism is on far stronger ground, dialectically speaking, in that it is a purely epistemological thesis, and so isn't hostage to wider extra-epistemological claims. Moreover, note that epistemological disjunctivism is meant to constitute a commonsense picture of the rational support that our perceptual beliefs enjoy in paradigm conditions, one that we are falsely led to abandon in light of faulty philosophical reasoning (the kind of reasoning that leads us to reject the possibility of factive perceptual reasons and adopt instead the new evil genius thesis). In this sense, epistemological disjunctivism is not a theoretical response to the problem of radical scepticism—which is surely what Davidson's response is—but rather a way of showing that the sceptical 'paradox' is in fact nothing of sort. That is, it is not a series of 'platitudes' which collectively entail a contradiction, but rather smuggles in dubious philosophical claims which we can show to be unwarranted.¹⁵

This brings me to a third observation about Davidson's anti-scepticism, which relates to the explicitly transcendental aspect of the reasoning in play. Barry Stroud (1968) famously objected that transcendental arguments do not establish quite what they are often presented as establishing. In particular, they don't establish what must be the case but only, at most, what we are committed to thinking must be the case. Applied to Davidson's anti-scepticism, the point would be that all that follows from granting his particular brand of content externalism is that one is committed to regarding one's set of beliefs as mostly true, but that it doesn't thereby follow that they are in fact true.¹⁶ It is, however, crucial that Davidson's anti-scepticism does establish the stronger conclusion, since otherwise it doesn't offer one a basis on which to reject (S1) in the sceptical paradox, and hence that paradox still stands. (Indeed, Davidson's anti-scepticism would now be no better off than the Sosa-Wright variety of anti-scepticism examined earlier).

The issues just raised are complex, and I can't hope to do justice to them here. Indeed, they are issues that don't particularly concern Davidson's anti-scepticism, but rather affect transcendental arguments in general (and to that extent will almost certainly affect the types of anti-scepticism offered by Burge and Putnam that Neta endorses too). Perhaps defenders of Davidson's position

can offer a compelling story in this regard. My point is only that the idea that a classical epistemic internalist can straightforwardly lay claim to a transcendental argument in support of her anti-scepticism is somewhat off the mark. Moreover, notice that this is not a problem that epistemological disjunctivism faces, as there is nothing remotely transcendental about this position. Indeed, this style of anti-scepticism is refreshingly direct, in that the claim in play is that the sceptical paradox is in fact a philosophical ruse which, when properly deconstructed, can be flatly rebutted. Yet again, then, we find that epistemological disjunctivism as an anti-sceptical proposal has significant dialectical advantages over classical epistemic internalism.

3. RESPONSE TO CLAYTON LITTLEJOHN

In his contribution to this symposium, Clayton Littlejohn (*this volume*) offers an extremely rich account of the role of reasons in (perceptual) knowledge, and how this relates to epistemological disjunctivism. There's a lot in what he writes that I agree with, especially when it comes—surprise, surprise!—to his positive proposals with regard to epistemological disjunctivism. He is certainly entirely correct to say that I leave quite a lot of the details of epistemological disjunctivism unspecified when it comes to rational support. As I explain in the *précis* above, my aim with the book was to set out the position in the broadest possible terms and to demonstrate that it is a viable proposal, in opposition to the prevailing wisdom. As a result, I was very keen to avoid allying the view to any further commitments which weren't strictly necessary.

A good example of this, which Littlejohn picks up on, concerns the relationship between epistemological disjunctivism and its metaphysical counterpart. In the book, I noted that there was no obvious entailment from the former to the latter, and so left the question of whether the epistemological disjunctivism should in addition endorse metaphysical disjunctivism (which is itself a controversial position) completely open. That said, I do endorse both views—I simply felt that it was beyond the remit of the book to in addition argue for the further claim. In his commentary, Littlejohn suggests that proponents of epistemological disjunctivism may well need to appeal to metaphysical disjunctivism in order to defend the view against a certain kind of objection. If that's right—and I grant that Littlejohn makes a compelling case for this conclusion—then that's fine by me, since as it happens I endorse both theses anyway.

Another point on which I say very little in the book is what one's rational standing involves in the bad case. It follows from my presentation of epistemological disjunctivism that it cannot be the factive reason that one sees that p , but I deliberately didn't offer any positive account in this regard. This is because I take this to be a further question which takes us beyond the general issue that I was engaging with, which is whether epistemological disjunctivism as a broad position in epistemology is even theoretically available. Littlejohn is quite right, however, that some of the moves that one might make here are less plausible than others, and thus that once we get into the details of the epistemological disjunctivist position we are going to have to make some tough choices.

One very compelling point that Littlejohn makes in this regard is that epistemological disjunctivism ought to try to avoid being committed to the idea that one's motivating reason in the bad case is a stunted version of the factive reason available in the good case. In particular, he demonstrates the oddity of saying that someone's motivating reason in the bad case is that she believes that p . Littlejohn has a nice example to illustrate this point. In the good case Agnes is upset because she sees that there's no more gin. But what do we say about the bad case where Agnes has falsely judged that there's no more gin? The temptation is to say that in this case she is upset because *she believes that* there's no more gin. But that can't be right, in that it would make Agnes unintelligible. She's upset because of the lack of gin, not because of *her beliefs* about gin.

I think that Littlejohn is onto something here, and that this will complicate the story that needs to be told about the nature of a subject's rational support in the bad case. In particular, Littlejohn notes that this calls into question the idea that perceptual belief is always based on reasons. One point to note in this regard is that Littlejohn in fact overstates my commitment to the relationship between perceptual knowledge and reasons. For while I think it is clear that paradigm cases of perceptual knowledge are rationally grounded, I'm careful not to make any general claims in this regard. In particular, I don't claim that perceptual belief is in general rationally grounded or that propositional knowledge is in general rationally grounded (and I certainly don't hold that all propositional knowledge must be grounded in factive reasons). One reason why I don't make the general claim about perceptual belief is precisely the one that Littlejohn seizes upon, which is that there may be grounds for treating an agent's perceptual belief in the bad case as not being based on reasons at all.

Now, in making this point about perceptual reasons in the bad case, Littlejohn makes a move that surprises me, in that he seems to suggest that this point generalises to perceptual reasons

more generally. That is, he seems to suggest at the very end of his commentary that once we move away from the idea that perceptual belief is based on reasons in the bad case, then we thereby also move away from the idea that perceptual knowledge more generally is based on reasons (i.e., even when the perceptual belief is formed in the good case). But I don't follow this train of reasoning. Why couldn't one's perceptual beliefs be based on reasons in the good case, but not based on reasons in the bad case? It could be that Littlejohn has an argument in mind here, but if so it would be good to hear it, as this strikes me as at least a possible position, and one that ought to be *prima facie* attractive to the epistemological disjunctivist.

This brings me to a related issue, which is that Littlejohn also seems to think that epistemological disjunctivism is committed to the idea that propositional knowledge is in general grounded in factive reasons. While this may be true of McDowell—there are certainly passages that suggest this reading anyway—it is not my view. Indeed, my more general view of knowledge is a proposal called *anti-luck virtue epistemology*. Roughly, this holds that knowledge is safe (i.e., non-lucky) cognitive success which is significantly creditable to one's manifestation of relevant cognitive agency (i.e., such that one's manifestation of relevant cognitive agency plays a significant role in the causal explanation of one's safe cognitive success).¹⁷ Note that this proposal makes no mention of reasons, much less factive reasons, and this is because it is entirely compatible with this proposal that one's propositional knowledge is not grounded in reasons at all. So while I argue, in line with epistemological disjunctivism, that perceptual knowledge is paradigmatically constituted by the possession of factive reasons, I don't hold that propositional knowledge more generally requires rational support, much less factive rational support.

With this in mind, I don't face the problem that Littlejohn highlights regarding inductive knowledge, which he correctly points out isn't plausibly rooted in factive rational support. (Mind you, my guess is that the committed McDowellian epistemological disjunctivist, assuming I'm right that such a view requires that all propositional knowledge is rooted in factive rational support, will simply claim that there is no inductive knowledge, or at least not in the fashion that we tend to suppose). On my view, while inductive knowledge may well involve a rational basis, what makes it knowledge is the fact that it satisfies the rubric laid down by anti-luck virtue epistemology. It is certainly not a defect in one's inductive knowledge, according to my view, that it doesn't involve factive rational support.

Relatedly, I wouldn't endorse the "infallibilist" thesis that Littlejohn outlines, such that all propositional knowledge requires factive reasons. Note that this isn't because I think that one can

have knowledge on merely probabilistic grounds (i.e., grounds which merely make p probable). I think that lottery-style cases demonstrate the implausibility of such a view, no matter how high the probabilities involved might be (short of 1). It is a mistake, however, to infer from this that all knowledge requires infallible evidence or factive rational support. What follows from lottery-style considerations is that this kind of infallible epistemic support is sufficient for knowledge, but not that it is necessary. The broader point raised by such cases, I claim, is that knowledge requires safe cognitive success, where this means a cognitive success that couldn't have easily been a failure. One can have probabilistic grounds as strong as you like (short of 1), and yet they can be compatible with unsafe—and thus *epistemically risky*—cognitive success. Knowledge excludes epistemic risk of this kind, which is why it demands safety. But one can capture this thought without having to claim that all knowledge is rooted in an infallible epistemic basis.

The reason why we have been drawn into these issues is that Littlejohn claims that the two arguments that he offers in support of epistemological disjunctivism essentially trade on the infallibilist idea that all propositional requires factive reasons. But I don't see that this is so. Epistemological disjunctivism trades on the idea that knowledge is paradigmatically about the possession of reasons. Even epistemic externalists like myself who maintain that knowledge doesn't always require rational support ought to accept this claim. Epistemological disjunctivism then further argues that such reasons had better be factive if they are to play the role that has been set out for them. It is entirely compatible with the foregoing that there might be kinds of propositional knowledge which don't involve rational support, factive or otherwise (and also that perceptual belief might not be supported by reasons either).

The first argument that Littlejohn offers, for example, doesn't seem at all undermined by simply being clear from the start that the target is not propositional knowledge in general but rather paradigmatic cases of perceptual knowledge. The claim would be only that it is vital to knowledge of this sort that it be grounded in "cognitive purchase on a fact", where the relevant cognitive purchase could only be provided by the possession of a factive reason. Similarly, we can adapt the second argument that Littlejohn offers, while preserving its spirit, by clarifying from the outset that the claim in play is not that all perceptual belief is grounded in reasons, but only that the kind of perceptual belief that amounts to paradigmatic perceptual knowledge must be grounded in reasons. Perhaps Littlejohn has a further argument up his sleeve on this score, but so far as I can tell there's no essential reason why the arguments for epistemological disjunctivism that he offers couldn't be

re-phrased without any general commitment to propositional knowledge being grounded in factive reasons.¹⁸

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NOTES

¹ More generally, the theory of knowledge that I favour is a view I call *anti-luck virtue epistemology* which incorporates an ability condition of just this kind. I defend this proposal in a number of places—see especially Pritchard, Millar & Haddock (2010, ch. 3) and Pritchard (2012a).

² As I noted in the *précis* above, my own view is that it is useful to offer a taxonomy of cases from very good to very bad, and that the traditional opposition between the epistemically paradigmatic ‘good’ case and the radically sceptical ‘bad’ case is not particularly helpful. See Pritchard (2011a; 2012b, part one) for more details about this taxonomy. But we can bracket this nuance for our purposes here.

³ See Pritchard (*forthcoming*), for my full treatment of the (Cartesian) problem of radical scepticism. See Pritchard (2005a, *passim*; 2005b) for more on the distinction between underdetermination-based and closure-based radical sceptical arguments.

⁴ I explore Putnam’s proposal in Pritchard & Ranalli (*forthcoming*).

⁵ I make positive use of Burge’s work in this regard in Carter & Pritchard (*forthcoming*), though not as applied to the problem of radical scepticism.

⁶ For more on the new evil genius thesis and how it relates to classical epistemic internalism and epistemological disjunctivism, see Neta & Pritchard (2007) and Pritchard (2011b; 2012b, part one).

⁷ For further discussion of underdetermination-based radical scepticism, particularly in contrast to the more familiar closure-based radical scepticism, see Pritchard (2005a; *passim*; 2005b; *forthcoming*).

⁸ As memorably pointed out by Schiffer (1996).

⁹ The contemporary treatment of the sceptical problem as a paradox is principally due to Stroud (1984). For a discussion of the dialectical implications of this point, see Williams (1991, *passim*), Wright (1991), Pritchard (2005a, *passim*; 2014b; *forthcoming*, *passim*).

¹⁰ The idea that a bridge is needed in this regard is, of course, due to Stroud (1968). I comment further on this point below.

¹¹ This is, of course, controversial—see Pritchard (2005c), Jenkins (2007), and Pedersen (2009). Nonetheless, I think that this worry can be overcome, as I explain in Pritchard (2014a).

¹² For more on the problems facing Wright’s response to radical scepticism, see Pritchard (2014a). Note that, as I explain in Pritchard (2014a), once we adopt the particular kind of Wittgensteinian anti-sceptical proposal that I endorse—see Pritchard (2012c; *forthcoming*)—then one can incorporate some of the insights of Wright’s approach. Crucially, however, these insights would no longer be load-bearing within the broader response to radical scepticism on offer.

¹³ I explore the twists and turns in some detail in Pritchard (2013). Simplifying somewhat, the main contrast is between the early presentations of the view—especially Davidson (1983)—which involve essential appeal to the idea of an “omniscient interpreter”, and later presentations—especially Davidson (1990), but see also Davidson (1999)—which make no such essential appeal to this idea.

¹⁴ Indeed, Davidson is quite explicit that while his argument offers some general presumption that any one of one’s beliefs is true, it does not follow that one’s beliefs as a whole are “justified enough, or in the right way, to constitute knowledge.” (Davidson 1983, 438)

¹⁵ Elsewhere—e.g., Pritchard (*forthcoming*)—I put this point in terms of whether an anti-sceptical proposal is *undercutting* or *overriding*. While epistemological disjunctivism is a paradigm example of the former, Davidson’s anti-scepticism is explicitly cast by him as an example of the latter, particularly in his later work.

¹⁶ See Genova (1999) for a vivid presentation of this line of objection against Davidson’s anti-scepticism. See also Stroud (1999), which adds the further twist that if Davidson really had shown what he claims to have shown (i.e., that one’s beliefs are in fact mostly true), then this would have been a *reductio* of his position.

¹⁷ See especially Pritchard, Millar & Haddock (2010, ch. 3) and Pritchard (2012a).

¹⁸ This symposium grew out of an author-meets-critics session at the 2014 Central APA in Chicago. I’m very grateful to my three commentators—Sandy Goldberg, Ram Neta, and Clayton Littlejohn—for their critical pieces. Thanks also to Geoff Pynn for organizing the session, and to Daniel Gross for chairing it. Thanks also to the editor of *Journal of Philosophical Research*, Mike DePaul, for agreeing to publish the papers from this symposium in his journal.